oh! BROTHER

FROM: SALLY ROESCH-WAGNER
TO: MICHAEL BIERNBAUM
DATE: November 09, 1992

Dear Michael:

I received your letter to Nikki and your proposed changes to her article on Saturday. I've gone through them, Nikki's cover letter to you and the article she and Rick finalized, and issue #24. Last night I got a call from Rick asking me for my reaction to your proposed changes and he asked me to convey those thoughts to you. I've written them out, and I'm Faxing copies to Rick and Nikki.

This is how I see things. By both of their accounts, Rick and Nikki went through a long and difficult process of forging out an article for publication that was acceptable to both of them. Not the article that either of them wanted, but a carefully and painstakingly negotiated article, one that found the common ground they could share. That is the first and most important thing that needs to be respected, I think. Whatever your usual editorial process, Michael, these were highly unusual circumstances: an essay published in the magazine that takes the editors to task, edited by the editors being taken to task.

An impossible task at best, and I have a great deal of respect for Rick setting aside his ego involvement in the subject matter, and working with Nikki on honing out a piece of real historic significance. It's a transitional moment. After having printed a pro-pedophile piece along with an ad for a pedophile organization, the journal publicly acknowledges its error and changes direction. Nikki's piece places the issue in the historical perspective of the magazine, traces the history. That part cannot be removed without destroying the integrity of her article. It's necessary for the reader to have it in order to place issue #24 of the magazine in context. It was necessary for me to have it, and I'm an editor. Rather than censoring that information, Michael (and the removal of that history which deals with you and Rick does feel to me like censorship) I'd like you to respond to it. Either you gave her the issue of *Uncommon Desires* or you didn't. Either you remember it or you don't. Either you ran the ad or you didn't. This is not libel, it's accountability. And it's not just your accountability.

When I read Nikki's account, I was horrified. How did I not see that ad? And I realized my accountability in not reading the journal more carefully. Take away the history and you deny all of us who are part of *Changing Men* the challenge to rethink our behavior that Nikki gives us. There's also Nikki's accountability. She chose not to say anything about the ad at the time, and has the accountability of the complicity of her silence. The piece points the finger at all of us.

When I read her essay, I thought that it was one of those transformational pieces that periodically emerge from the movement, like Robin Morgan's "Goodbye to All That" and Andrea Dworkin's piece on the danger of Biological Determinism; a feminist classic. Each one of them is a product of struggle, of that moment of "aha when we see beyond and there is no turning back. I felt reading Nikki's essay the same empowering strength I felt the first time I read "Goodbye to All That."

When I read Nikki's account that you, Peter and Rick all denied knowingly having run the

ad for *Uncommon Desires*, I thought about the painful process of being publicly called on my racism. When I realized that I didn't even remember a statement I'd made, it was so unimportant to me and I was so unaware of its consequences. And the ego-shattering experience of feeling to the tips of my toes how wrong I was, and the cost of my unawareness on people I care about, friends. And then the healing process of acknowledging the truth of those accusing me of racism, and the commitment to become someone who would no longer violate unknowingly, to make the changes to become someone who could be trusted. And the empowerment as I work on those changes, and feel them in my behavior.

And reading Nikki's article, I felt strengthened in my resolve to accept public accountability for my screw-ups, by seeing how respectful I felt of you and Rick and Peter, and especially you, Michael, to stand and listen to Nikki's recounting your behavior, and accepting accountability for it. Or answering, coming back publicly and telling your reality. But not shutting off the dialogue, the process. And to the extent that I respected you in anticipating that Nikki's article would be published, I disrespect you if you choose to silence that place of accountability in the journal.

I was, quite honestly, shocked by the words you used in your cover letter to Nikki: "witch-hunt or libelous conspiracy-building" implying that her article as written was filled with "insinuation, slander, hate, character assassination and threat" but that you'd cleaned it up and made it "principled, focused, the writing clear and of quality, non-redundant, true to its own energy." I think it was all those things without your changes. And I feel implicated in your implied charges, because those were the parts of the article that empowered me. I know they were the parts, because your articles (and it is a separate article, I don't think that it's editorial changes you've made, I think you gutted the voice, the spirit, the flow and the integrity of Nikki's piece) didn't empower me. It still left me with a bad feeling in my heart from Jeff Beane's article in *CM* 24.

I had not read the issue, as I told you, but when I was in California last week my daughter found the box that had been forwarded to me there with the copies of *CM* #24 last summer. I felt sick after I read it. Mostly because of Jeff's article. It is one of the most insidious and deadly things I have ever read. It is the most frightening thing I've seen in any pro-feminist publication. It is the violation celebrated and delighted in by the perpetrator, taking the reader along into nonconsensual sex so smoothly and skillfully that you almost forget there is a victim. It is a celebration of a felony committed on a child.

Nor was Jeff's essay an isolated incident. Enabled by the "Transgressive Sex" piece and the NAMBLA ad, it had a context. It needs a powerful antidote. And Nikki's essay does that. Yours doesn't; it removes the antidote.

Nikki's does it through claiming the "male" language of sex, and using it to denounce the violators through the humor of the oppressed and the strength of language she uses. "Suck my patriot" really made me laugh, it works magnificently in that paragraph, along with the power of writing she employs in moving immediately to sado-fascist scenarios, making the connection while we're still receptive and open to hearing it from the laughter.

And her parody is an integral part of her voice and the article. The out-there directness of REPKA is the exact mirror image of the insidious hidden message of Jeff's essay. The Northern Cheyenne have, rightfully I think, named the sexual violation of children as "spirit killing." For a long time women and men in the anti-rape movement have said that if the cost of rape is made high enough, men will stop. I wish I would have had a big sister like Nikki raps. It's a good vision.

I want her essay to go into the next issue of *CM* with the spirit and strength of it intact. If you disagree with what she says, I'd like you to write a response. But let the issues come out.

I'm reminded of two intellectual mentors of mine, both men, interestingly. John Stuart Mill, who said something to the effect that you learn the truth best from the person who most believes

it. Because you did not believe what Nikki was writing about, you destroyed her truth in your rewriting. The other is Franz Fanon, who writes about the necessity of the oppressed burning off the definition of the oppressor. Nikki powerfully burns off the definition Jeff makes of child-violation as erotic and acceptable. Her voice needs to be heard, not your revised version of it.

I'd like you to go back to Nikki's article and see where your blocking points are with it, and to consider minor changes that would make it acceptable to you for publication. *SRW*